A Talk By John Taylor Gatto, Former New York State Teacher of the Year

A Map, a Mirror, and a Wristwatch

Let me edge into this presentation by telling you something about the children I teach and about some of the changes I saw in the general character development of these kids in the 30 years I spent inside public school classrooms. By a series of accidents, certainly not through my own design, I came to spend about a third of my time with confident white children from prosperous families, about a third of my time with a very mixed group of kids who represented "problem children" of a fairly mild and manageable sort, and a third of my time with black, Puerto Rican, and Dominican children from Harlem and Spanish Harlem; so when I tell you in advance that the observations I'm going to make apply to all of these groups I have earned my opinion in long and arduous action as a front-line practitioner in the school wars our press coverage dimly reflects.

Who are the children I taught? If you spent a short time with them under carefully controlled conditions, as perhaps a visiting businessman or politician might, you would see children who seemed to meet traditional specifications of the genus: alert, intelligent, active, funny, emotional beings who through judicious application of adult attention and some occasional resort to tricks and tricky machines can be brought to listen, to question, to analyze, to record, and to respond in a heartening fashion.

It would be an error, however, to fashion a long-range teaching strategy of these quick impressions—yes, my kids look and act as kids have always done, but all of my children are marked deeply by their experience in a secret underworld of the industrial society in decay—the government compulsion school. Schools, too, look as they did prior to 1960, but they are not the same at all. For a whole host of complicated reasons schools have been converted into behavioral training laboratories, where intellectual development—the enlightened historical justification for *schooling* children at all—has been abandoned in favor of other forms of training. So in an era of great technical progress my students have been invisibly disfigured by historical placement in a time without moral logic; in a time without an ethical source in God, in natural law, or in other forms of traditional authority, this destines many of them, rich and poor, for meaningless lives of unrooted activity. Only the State, jealous of its final claim to total loyalty, speaks regularly through its rules and laws about proper behavior, and because the voice of the State is, by turns, too rigid, or too pragmatic (conditional/situational ethics), or too dishonest (playing favorites/promising what it cannot deliver), children listen less and less. Nor should they do any differently; their disobedience is an inborn defense: they

are trying to save their sanity or their souls, though few would have the language to put it that way.

The children I teach are victims of a very specific human delusion, one which once affected only kings and priests, though now it infects big bureaucrats, public and private, and schoolteachers alike. I refer to the fantastic notion that something called "mass man" actually exists, that human intellectual talent is for the most part a function of economics and social class, and that these conditions can be scientifically managed by a huge, intricately articulated bureaucracy which itself is cantilevered with other huge bureaucracies. This is the ultimate statement of scientific materialism on human life since in this view human nature is the result of random environmental factors; if the randomness is removed a good result will be almost automatic. Thus, it is thought, the training of the young, the corporate world of economics, the political world of power, breeding, death, war, amusement, health, and other basic aspects of individual and social life should be centrally controlled and regulated because all men and women are the same at the core, need the same things, and are as malleable as plastic.

This peculiar illusion that people are a mass, based on fear, greed, the need to have security, the need to justify special privileges, and other dark sources in the human psyche, leads inevitably to a form of social organization which bleeds significance from individual lives by removing decisions of consequence from the individual. Without personal significance people go insane, many become outlaws. This is the world of modern bureaucratic society which can only exist in a stable form through the relentless, nearly comprehensive social and psychological training provided by mass schooling. It is easy to pierce the veil of fiction that schooling has anything much to do with reading, writing, or arithmetic. The frightening fact that particular myth is still perpetuated is ample testimony to how unwilling we have been to face a horrifying truth. Schools work exactly as they were designed to work; they produce incomplete and tractable human beings, exactly as they were designed to do. To a scientific morality such a scheme has much to recommend it. It makes management of mass-man seem necessary—and real.

Scientific management is an idea older than Plato. Its theory is found in cabalistic lore attributed to Solomon and in records of pyramid builders before him; but in 20th century schooling the thing derives from certain schemes of the American efficiency engineer, Frederick Taylor, who at the beginning of the present century was the driving force behind the imposition of mechanical ideals on every conceivable plane of human affairs including sexual love (think of sex manuals with their diagrams and recommended sequences), ways in which human energy could be regulated and utilized according to standards of machine productivity. Behind Taylor, of course, were the dreams of cosmic social engineers, intimations that a long-awaited planetary society was at hand, and that because of the troubling defects of "mass man" it could only be run as a beehive world, or a hospital planet, or a prison state. Such had John Calvin's dark outlook on human nature which had once provided the spine of New England life transformed itself in the public and private plans of those groups which thought of themselves as

"progressive". Hell was no longer the destination of most of us after death, Life and Death themselves were only epiphenomena, organizing and regulating society and nature were the only remaining things of meaning in a machine world.

Re-forming the past.

We won't have time here for a clinic in philosophy, but I'll ask you to examine the implications of some of this, if human beings are cleverly disguised mechanisms then where can the notion of "liberty" apply? Liberty and the theological notion of free will are joined irrevocably in a close relationship. You can say, "I don't have time for this lofty stuff," but your own actions will make a liar out of you. People are *free*, or they are *bound*, determined by forces out of their own control. The society you allow stems from the decision which. So I want you to think of this: if people are *not* mechanisms (let's say that for the sake of argument) then what is the net effect of *treating* them so? Adam Smith doesn't talk about this in *Wealth of Nations* but he does have something to say about it in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. If you treat people like machines the moral effect on them and yourself is lousy.

Or think of this: how can you "educate" a machine at all? Even in a loose usage of that verb, a machine is only improved from *outside* the mechanism or circuitry. But in a human sense people have a very *limited* ability to be improved by the attention of others from the outside; most of the job, according to every major thinker who ever turned attention to this, has to be privately accomplished in the private interior of each individual consciousness. You can't *teach* courage or perseverance, wisdom or piety. Such things can be *learned*, it's clear, but taught, no. Yet people only begin to be educated when they tackle such goals—indeed, they are hardly completely human until that moment.

Individual development has to be fought for privately in a free market of plentiful choices, no one can do it for you. Too much interference early on cripples our natural progress toward independence and produces its opposite, *de*pendence. We all recognize the bad effect a too indulgent parent has, we should begin to see the same force at work in a too indulgent school. This formula has been clearly understood by the powerful of this planet for thousands of years; even a cursory inspection of the development of their own young shows plenty of early exposure to unmonitored experience, risk-taking, independence, high performance standards, and many other characteristics which receive only lip service in government schooling, even suburban government schooling. Elite education, where the kid does hard work and does it without interference, is one likely cause for the amazing continuity of certain families throughout history. Yet elite education can be provided at less cost than factory school training. Some irony there. Until roughly the same time of the Jackson presidency in the 19th century rich and poor alike could get this same sort of education in a variety of different ways, but from Horace Mann's time until today those possibilities have been deliberately—I feel tempted to say "scientifically"—closed down for all but the economic elites and a few very determined parents from all the other classes. Why has that happened do you suppose?

In spite of a long-standing knowledge how human education is done right, the model Frederick Taylor, high priest of scientific management, sought to impose was a machine model, a model whose results are highly predictable, one which eliminates risks by setting its sights very low. Although in a limited sense this procedure successfully increases material output when the target is cheap, standardized, mass-produced merchandise, it only manages this productivity by crippling the self-governing spirit. So there's a big price to pay. Whether you decide to pay it or not depends a lot upon your regard for your fellow human beings; perhaps it depends on your idea of God, who knows?

Harvard advice

A few years back one of the schools at Harvard issued some advice to its students on planning a career in the new international economy it believed was arriving. It warned sharply that academic classes and professional credentials would be devalued when measured against real world training. Ten qualities were offered as essential to successfully adapt to what Harvard believed was a rapidly changing world of work.

See how many of these you think are regularly taught in the schools of your city, including its "gifted and talented" classes:

1) The ability to define problems without a guide.

2) The ability to ask hard questions which challenge prevailing assumptions.

3) The ability to work in teams without guidance.

4) The ability to work absolutely alone.

5) The ability to persuade others that your course is the right course.

6) The ability to debate issues and techniques in public.

7) The ability to reorganize information into new patterns.

8) The ability to discard irrelevant data and find what you need from the masses of information.

9) The ability to think dialectically.

10) The ability to think inductively, deductively, and heuristically.

You might be able to come up with a better list than Harvard did without surrendering any of these fundamental ideas, and yet from where I sit—and I sat around schools for nearly 30 years—I know we don't teach any of these things as a matter of school policy. And for good reason, schools as we know them couldn't function at all if we did. Try to imagine a school where children challenged prevailing assumptions or worked alone without guidance. How about a school where children defined their own problems? If you want your kid to learn what Harvard says is necessary you'll have to arrange it outside school time in between the dentist and MTV. If you are poor you'd better forget it altogether. None of the schools I ever worked for were able to provide any important parts of this vital curriculum for children. All the schools I worked for taught nonsense up front and under the table they taught young people how to be dumb, how to be slavish, how to be frightened, and how to be dependent.

Things weren't always this way in the United States, indeed for the first 250 years of our history schooling here was wildly entrepreneurial; before we had forced schooling on the government model we had abundant schooling of many different types and the result by any historical measure were quite spec-

tacular. Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, the philosophical basis for the American Revolution, sold 600,000 copies to a population of two and a half million colonists (about 75 percent of them African slaves or indentured servants!); James Fenimore Cooper's novels, rich with periodic sentences and dense with allusions, sold five million copies in the first two decades of the 19th century in a population of about eighteen million; Scott's novels matched that sale as did Noah Webster's monumental *Speller*. All this happened long before compulsion schooling was more than a gleam in the eye of certain interested parties in the early Federal period.

Pierre duPont de Nemours, who had a monopoly on gunpowder sales for the War of 1812 said in a book he wrote in that year, *National Education in the United States*, that "less than four in every thousand cannot read and do numbers" with great facility, and the habit of Bible reading at the breakfast table had led to such skill in argumentation among the young that he predicted the new nation would soon hold a corner on the world's supply of lawyers. Tocqueville's classic *Democracy in America*, whose first volume appeared in 1835, confirmed duPont's conclusions, and a book written a few years later by another French aristocrat, Michael Chevalier, said in astonishment that the American farmer had such a mind that he entered the fields in the morning with the plow in one hand and Descartes in the other!

Literacy in language and number was, from the beginning, highly valued in the New World, far beyond practical need. It was as if the promise that each mind could soar to unprecedented achievement beyond the limit of class-bound European practice inspired the commonality to take what its natural gifts offered. In this new scheme schooling was everywhere considered important, but nowhere was it considered *very* important. The principle that the educated man, like Benjamin Franklin, is largely *self-taught* was the real dynamic honored, and though the decision to proceed in this fashion was probably an accident of time and place in the last New World on the planet rather than any determination of scientific pedagogy, by some unlucky happenstance it is exactly the brilliant spring of development twentieth century institutional schooling has broken.

Lesson XXVII, "The Self-Taught Mathematician", used at one-room schools in the northeast in the year 1833 (20 years before the first compulsion school law) for children who would today be fourth to sixth graders is a revealing window into the attitudes toward learning present fifty years after we became a nation. It is the story of Edmund Stone, a self-educated Scottish mathematician born at the beginning of the 18th century. His father was gardener to the Duke of Argyle. One day when the Duke was walking in his garden he observed a Latin copy of Newton's *Principia* lying on the grass and thinking it had been brought from his own library sought to carry it back to its place. Stone, a boy of 18, rushed forward to claim the book for his own.

Yours?" said the Duke. "Do you then understand Geometry, Latin, and Newton?"

"I know a little of them," replied the young man.

The Duke, surprised, entered into a conversation with the young man who had not the slightest acquaintance with

schooling and was astonished at the force, the accuracy, and the candor of his answers.

"But how," said the Duke, "came you by the knowledge of these things?"

Stone replied, "A servant taught me to read when I was eight. Does one need to know anything more than the twenty-six letters in order to learn everything else that one wishes?"

"I first learned to read. The masons were then at work upon your house. I approached them one day and observed that the architect used a rule and compasses, and that he made calculations. I inquired what might be the meaning and use of these things. I was informed there was a science called arithmetic. So I purchased a book of arithmetic and I learned it. I was told there was another science called geometry; I got the necessary books and I learned geometry. By reading I learned that there were good books in these two sciences in Latin. I bought a dictionary and I learned Latin. I understood also that there were good books in French. I bought a dictionary and I learned French."

"And this, my Lord, is what I have done; it seems to me that we may learn everything when we know the twenty-six letters of the alphabet."

Stone went to London at the age of 23 and published his first work, *A Treatise on Mathematical Instruments*. Two years later he was chosen a Fellow of the Royal Society. And such was the lesson conveyed to five and ten-year-olds in Boston in 1833, if you knew how to read well you could learn anything you chose by yourself. Let me stick my schoolteacher's nose in here for a moment to say that this is obviously the same lesson I learned at my mother's knee in Monongahela a hundred years after "The Self-Taught Mathematician" was taught in Boston and two hundred years after Stone himself had learned it. I knew how to read well before I was five, thanks to my mother, and never had much difficulty learning anything I chose to learn after that. It was only after the coming of an enormous, multi-layered, densely articulated form of government schooling, a form imposed on the total population at the beginning of the twentieth century, not with the intention of enhancing *literacy* but of controlling and shaping *behavior*, that Stone's lesson was pushed into the background or in places discarded entirely. Learn to read well and you can teach yourself everything.

I want to show you just how far modern schooling is a radical deviation from the past by taking you back to George Washington's boyhood as the middle of the eighteenth century approached. Ifschooling, a form imposed on the total population at the beginning of the twentieth century, not with the intention of enhancing literacy but of controlling and shaping behavior, that Stone's lesson was pushed into the background or in places discarded ented both formally with a passion not supplied by schoolteachers.

These studies paid off for Washington because the grace they communicated to all his actions allowed him to physically dominate any gathering. Think of Michael Jordan the basketball player of whom it has been said he plays so well it's exactly as if the other players aren't even playing the same game. Well, that was Washington thanks to his twin obsessions. Listen to his friend George Mercer describe him as a young man:

He is straight as an Indian, measur-

ing six feet, two inches in his stockings and weighing 175 pounds...His frame is padded with well-developed muscles, indicating great strength.

Wouldn't everyone wish this for their own son? Washington got there by spending a great deal of time doing things that government schools ignore and would hardly teach.

Washington was no intellectual giant his friends agreed, but because of the unusual position he holds in American mythology it might be useful to see what subjects his average mind studied as a boy, the better to understand just what it is we have accomplished by 20th century state schooling. First we should note that although Washington didn't attend school until he was 11 (the same age, incidentally, that Woodrow Wilson learned to read) he had no trouble learning reading, writing, and arithmetic on his own. None at all, nor did any of his contemporaries who cared to learn such things have much difficulty whether they were rich or poor. Indeed in most places in the colonies or the early republic you couldn't go to school at all until you had first become literate. Few wanted to waste their time teaching what was so easy to learn. There is an enormous amount of evidence that colonial America was comprehensively literate wherever literacy was valued; children became literate because they wanted to be and because they were expected to be because it isn't hard to do.

But back to George at 11 on his way to school for the first time. What did he begin to study there? How about geometry, trigonometry, and surveying? Is that what your own average-minded 11-year-old studies in sixth grade? Why not do you suppose? Or perhaps you think it was only a dumbed-down version of those things that Washington got, some kid's game. Well, maybe, but how do you account for this? Two thousand days after Washington first picked up a surveyor's transit in school at the age of 11 he assumed the office of official surveyor of Culpepper County, Virginia, a wonderful way to make a living in early America. Not only was the job highly paid but the frontier surveyor could pick out and keep the best land for himself.

For the next three years Washington earned in modern purchasing power about $100,000 a year. Perhaps his social connections helped this fatherless boy to get the position, but in a frontier society anyone would be crazy to give a boy serious work unless he could actually do it. I mean, what would the neighbors say? Almost at once Washington began speculating in land; by the time he was 21 he had leveraged his knowledge and capital into 2,500 acres of prime land in Frederick County, Virginia. Not a bad place then or now to own a few acres.

Washington had no father and as we know he was no genius, but learned geometry, trigonometry and surveying in school starting when he was 11, and he was rich by his own effort at 21. In school he studied frequently used legal forms including bills of exchange, tobacco receipts, bail bonds, servant indentures, wills, land conveyances, leases and patents. From these forms he was able to recreate the theory, philosophy and custom which had produced them. He had an average mind but by all accounts this steeping in grown-up reality hardly bored him. I had the same sort of experience with disruptive Harlem kids 250 years later. They stopped being hoodlums when I gave them real things to do. When did we lose the understand-

ing that young people *yearn* for this kind of knowledge? Or was that yearning disregarded deliberately in order to create a different social reality?

On his own hook young Washington decided to scientifically study what might be called "gentlemanly deportment", how to be well regarded by the best people. Out of his journals I've taken his rule 56 to illustrate how he gathered his own character in hand, becoming his own father:

"Associate yourself with men of good Quality if you Esteem your own reputation."

A sharp kid, that one, is it any wonder he became our first President?

Washington also studied geography and astronomy, gaining a knowledge thereby of the continents, the globe, and the heavens. In light of the putdowns of his reading you'll be interested to know that he read regularly the famous and elegant *Spectator* from London, which was sort of like the *New Yorker* before Tina Brown got her hooks on it. By the time he was 18 he had read all the writings of Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Daniel Defoe. But he read much more than the great English novelists, he read, too, Seneca's *Morals*, Julius Caesar's *Commentaries*, and the major writings of other Roman generals. What an amazing standard Adams and Jefferson must have had to consider Washington illiterate.

At 16 he began writing memos to himself about the design of his own clothing; years later he became his own architect for the magnificent estate of Mt.Vernon.

George Washington, as we now know, had an average mind in the eyes of the people who knew him best, yet he had no apparent difficulty studying the spots off technical manuals about agriculture and economics without a guide. The mysterious nature of money particularly interested him, he perceived that to the learned money was a much less valuable thing than wealth. Using his own research about such things, Washington was able to figure out that the talk of British bankers, politicians, and creditors about the importance of internationalism and global markets was a cunning way to drain his own resources into their pockets. He saw that the economics of tobacco farming (which had been forced on Virginia) made the tobacco farmer dependent on international factors, put his well-being out of his own control. So Washington, in his early 20s, began experimenting with domestic industry—where he could keep a close eye on things himself.

First he tried to grow hemp. That's called marijuana today, but presumably he was growing it for rope, not to smoke. He was 25. It didn't work. Next he tried to grow flax. He was 28. It didn't work. But because Washington had been educated to think for himself and not to wait for a teacher to tell him what to do he kept trying. At 31 he hit on wheat.That first year he sold 257 bushels. The third year 2,600 bushels. The seventh year 7,500 bushels. He built flour mills in various parts of Virginia and marketed his own brand of flour, think of it, "George Washington's Finest Home Grown Flour", accept no imported substitutes! While that business was maturing he turned his attention to building fishing boats. By 1772 his boats were pulling in 900,000 herring a year. George Washington was no genius, but partly because he got an education and wasn't compelled to waste all his youth in a government school scheme he did

okay for himself.

There is no public school in the United States set up to allow a George Washington to happen; an Andrew Carnegie, from a poor family, who was well on his way to becoming rich at age 13 through a combination of hard work and intelligence, would be referred for psychological counseling; a Thomas Edison would find himself in Special Ed. No doubt about it.

Anyone who can read independently and runs a comparison with the present school product and what the American past *proved* kids can do will discover the magnitude of our government school institution's negative accomplishment.

In its movement toward programmatic society at the turn of the 20th century, scientific management found ways to break apart the natural sanctuaries of family, religion, tradition and place where a student might flee to escape his allotted mechanical destiny. It is one of the rich ironies of 20th century secular schooling that certain traditional religious groups like the Amish, the Mennonites, the Quakers, the Mormons, the orthodox Jews, The Jesuits and a few others found ways to aggressively preserve religious sources of private meaning—and became prosperous and significant citizens as a direct result. But many of the rest of us were flushed clean away from our roots. We were forcibly retrained to regard our own families, churches and neighbors as expendable, disposable, exchangeable—to think of them as conditional on good performance.

Now if historic families, those timeless families which continue to exist for centuries have one distinguishing characteristic that cannot be duplicated by temporary, rootless families, it is the property of conferring categorical significance on their members. Categorical significance means that you count *because you are*, because you exist, not because of something you can do, or whether you are successful, strong, or beautiful. Being categorical cannot survive grading or comparison. This point cannot be overemphasized because networks which only simulate family, like school, the army, the workplace, your bridge club, etc., just can't do it. Categorical significance is the opposite of conditional significance, that form of status operating in networks where the respect you receive is directly proportional to your performance. The Prodigal Son parable is the Western world's symbolic illustration and it helps to think of it if you want to measure whether this priceless quality is present or absent. Does your family love you in spite of anything? Do you love *them* in spite of anything? Reciprocity in a good family is almost beside the point.

Back to the children I teach. I have noticed no one *talks* to my kids though everyone commands their time. Because of seating arrangements in orderly rows, because of the solitary nature of television and computer operation, my children have very little ability to talk, even to each other. They have been socialized to speak only to children their own age, and then only at approved intervals. Partly as a result of this and partly from a confluence of other reasons, I notice with increasing discomfort that children do not know who they are, where they are, or even what time it is.

Certainly I mean that metaphorically, but also I mean it literally: certain basic tools of self-knowledge like mirrors, maps, clocks, and so on are kept

away from children—at least in any classroom you would care to visit in New York City. Other basic tools aren't around either, like hammers, chisels, saws, glue, telephones, calendars, typewriters, paper, pens, scissors, rulers. They just aren't there, at least not in accessible places. Schools are stripped bare of effective tools, not because of lack of money but because the autonomy that tools confer works against the collective socialization logic schools are about.

Tools constitute a curriculum of power. This seems something too fundamental to belabor. It is hard to make tool-competent people into a proletariat. Did you ever wonder why kids don't do the cooking and serving in a school, or the glazing, wiring, plumbing, roofing, and furniture repair? I've wondered about that often. At any rate a malaise follows the withdrawal of tools from common life. Of 62 functioning classrooms in my intermediate school there is a clock in exactly one of them. And it's been years since I saw a student wear a wristwatch. What could be going on? Something spooky I can tell you.

The clock, Lewis Mumford tells us, is the foremost machine of modern technics, not merely a means of keeping track of the hours but a way to synchronize the actions of diverse individuals. And the watch is the personalization of time, a major stimulus to the individuality we cherish as a salient aspect of Western civilization. The turning hands of a watch (not a digital obviously) are a measure of time used and time remaining, time spent and time wasted, time past and time to come. As such it is a key to personal achievement and productivity. The watch is a defense against panic in a time of turbulence such as we all surely agree our kids are living through at present.

Just as my children have no clocks or wristwatches, they are seldom in a classroom that offers a mirror in which to see themselves, to verify their inner states outwardly, to try on attitudes with. A reflecting surface is one important way we come to know ourselves. If classrooms have none, then television—in the mental room it creates—is worse. Television takes a very thin sample of human physical types and broadcasts this unrepresentative fragment endlessly. Most of the black people on television have white features, have you noticed? How do you suppose that happens? And most of the white kids who are featured in that vaguely precise way we call "ethnic" are hardly ever shown in television commercials or programming. In the mirror of American school and video-culture, most of us are invisible non-persons, white or black.

Maps and children are kept apart, too, so some of my 14-year-old children think it is 100,000 miles to California, some think it is 9,000,000 miles. I seldom have more than one kid a year who can come within a thousand miles of the reality. My kids don't know what a mile is, not really, although I think they could pass a test on it; in similar fashion they don't know what democracy is, or what money is, or what an economy is, or how to fix anything. They've heard of Mogadishu and Saddam Hussein but they couldn't tell you the name of the tree outside their window if their life depended on it. That's what so-called global thinking since 1910 has done to reality, it put a utopian spin on things. Some of them can do quadratic equations, but they can't sew a button on a shirt or fry an egg; they can bubble in

answers with a number two pencil but they can't build a wall. Many of them have no idea that most of the men and women on earth believe in God, or how that might affect the way they live.

The whole dull liar's world that government schooling has created is a form of abstract witchcraft, mumbo jumbo leading nowhere like Mogadishu or Saddam Hussein. The truth is that my kids are unable to plot a future because they don't know where they are or who they are. How can you know who you are if you don't know your own family, and how can you know your own family if none of you are home together very often? Who arranged things this way, because surely they didn't just *happen*?

Nobody I ever taught had any idea how many people live in New York City or what significance such a fact might have, few know what the city abuts upon, how long ago the Revolution was fought there, or why or who the enemy was. They have been deprived of the proper experience to care about such things. This is the characteristic profile of a proletariat, it cares about very little except avoiding punishment and filling its belly. People aren't proles by nature but by training, a proletariat doesn't just *happen*, it is *made*.

The fact we are a revolutionary nation and what that did to our subsequent history good and bad has been carefully screened from the view of children, even from ones who can parrot words about Patrick Henry and Sam Adams; the magnificent Second Amendment to our Constitution with its vast trust in the common sense of the common people, and its vast mistrust of government has been perverted by the rhetoric of our academic leadership into an eccentric privilege of misfits and scoundrels. We have the right to bear arms mainly as protection against *our own* government going astray, only secondarily to protect our homes. The proof of that lies in looking at what the British colonists in America did with guns when the British government went astray—they pitched it out on its ears and became Americans. They couldn't have done that without personal firearms. The possibility such a situation might arise again is commemorated in the Second Amendment. But someone decided you weren't supposed to learn that so you don't. Can you imagine why?

In the ongoing condition of derangement among my kids caused by ignorance of basic facts like knowing where they are you'd think one specific remedy would be giant wall maps of the neighborhood, the city, the state, the nation, and the world; you would think these things would be permanent decorations in every classroom and every corridor of the school hive, but you would be mistaken. What maps there are will be found in "social studies" rooms, but most often not even there. Whose interest is served by kids not knowing basic stuff like this?

I could go on and on about other fundamental, inexpensive tools missing from my students' lives but the point of this progression has been to draw a radical conclusion:

School is a barrier to education

It is quite impossible to think this happened by accident, although I am prepared to grant that the original group of social engineers who set up the school machine is dead, and for the most part the peculiar motives they had in overturning a very successful free market in

American schooling have been forgotten. School perpetuates itself today in the ugly form it was given originally because it has become the most profitable business in the United States. We need to look no further than that for a conspiracy. Structural reform of schooling would disenfranchise an enormous number of comfortable people. Talk about change is permitted, but never more than minor tinkering follows.

Schools are barriers to the education of children. This is particularly true for children of poverty, but I believe the statement holds for all classes of the young. Schools are black holes. If they miss the decisive significance of a mirror, a map, and a wristwatch, you can be certain anything else of importance has been missed, too. Reform will only come about when there is an angry national debate about the real purpose of these warehouse institutions, a debate in which sham defenses like "teaching children to read" are finally thrown aside and reality faced square on. Schools do exactly what they were assigned to do in the first decade of the 20th century—they contain the poor. Having taught poor children for many years I don't think they need to be feared any more than rich kids, but I want to be certain to put the bell on the cat. Fear of the poor in the United States first crested with the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, that's the event that started the real drive for government schools. Who knew *what* the poor were capable of in a revolutionary democracy, better to get them locked up where they could be watched. Fear of the poor crested a second time just before and just after the Civil War when waves of Catholic immigrants from Ireland and Italy poured into this country strong, resourceful, energetic, and child-loving—people with family ties who couldn't easily be pushed around. Trying to push them led to a series of violent national strikes, railroad strikes in Chicago and steel strikes in Pittsburgh. Remember when Andy Carnegie sent an army of Pinkertons to shoot the steel strikers at Homestead? The Pinkertons got shot instead. It was those strikes which finally nailed the children in the school coffin where they've rested for just about a century. What nobody figured on was the ambitious reach of civil service bureaucrats. They would not rest content as guardians of the poor *alone*, but would seek to wax fatter so the destiny of all children would be in their hands. Thus was the road to Outcomes-Based Education paved.

Who will fix this thing now it has become a central core of the American economy, the single largest hiring agent, the largest contractor? We can't count on much help from professional school reformers or from state education departments because the business is their bread and butter.

And yet, even without our experts we're going to have to find some way to sidestep official owners of the school monopoly and relieve the terrible stresses growing up absurd this way causes. The elasticity of our children is nearly exhausted. I've deliberately borrowed a term from the world of structural engineering because I think it applies. When building materials lose their elasticity they don't fail immediately but pass through a stage of plastic behavior, where the deformations don't return to true but take some dangerous and unpredictable course. Our children as a class have begun to display plastic behavior.

What else would you call our world's record teenage suicide rate, teenage murder rate, and our national all-encompassing addictions to violence, alcohol, drugs, commercial entertainments, the narcotic-like addiction we have to magical machines, and a long list of other aberrations. Each generation we have produced since the very recent invention of government compulsion-school seems to me less elastic, more plastic than the one before it.

There are many fine and inexpensive ways to inspire children to provide a first-class education for themselves, we all know a few of them. But whether it's going to be possible to get an education in the new schools of the year 2000 will depend on political decisions made by those who hold power in trust for all of us. Or perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps it will depend on defiant personal decisions of simple people, like the quiet revolution of homeschoolers taking place under our noses right now, which to me seems the most exciting social movement since the pioneers, a revolution in which our type of factory schooling is not contested at all, just treated as monumentally irrelevant, which it certainly is.

Give me a minute to be visionary. If we closed the government schools, divided half the tax money currently spent on these places among parents with kids to educate, and spent the other half on free libraries, on underwriting apprenticeships for every young person, and on subsidizing any group who wanted to open a school a current of fresh air would sweep away the past in a short time. If further we made provisions for a continuous public dialogue on the local level—so that people in the street began to count once again—if we strictly limited political terms of office in order to weaken the protective legislative net around businesses which profit from mass schooling, and if we launched a national program of family revival with all the energy we reserve for wars we would soon find the American school nightmare changing into a dream we could all be proud of.

That isn't going to happen, I know.

Very well. The next best thing then is to deconstruct mass schooling, minimizing the "school" aspect of the thing and maximizing the educational one. What that means in simple terms is trusting children, trusting parents, trusting families, trusting communities to be the main architects in the training of the young. It means reversing the familiar teacher/student equation so that toxic professionalism which sees teaching, wrongheadedly, as the key to learning can be relegated to the Prussian nightmare from whence it sprang. That's a formula for a priesthood, not for an education. Socrates in the *Apology* told us that if we professionalized teaching two bad results would occur: first, what is easy to learn would be made to appear difficult; and second, what can be learned quickly would be stretched out indefinitely to provide some security for the pedagogue. Is there anyone who doesn't recognize this is precisely what we have allowed to happen? Even this simpler goal of deconstructing institutional schooling will require enough courage to challenge deeply rooted assumptions such as the assumption that the poor are stupid, bestial, or criminal. And it will require a great amount of stamina because this school monster is alive and growing, and very, very strong.

Now let me give you some practical suggestions drawn from a lifetime

teaching and thinking about schools. I've arranged them in no particular order. Even invoking a few of these safeguards would bring beneficial changes to a school or district. I have ten suggestions in all, and you will likely have some of your own to add as you hear mine.

1) Make Everybody Teach. The ghastly proliferation of non-teaching jobs began when it was imposed on schools by local and state politicians and the new Germanic teacher colleges about the turn of the century. It is wasteful and demoralizing. There should be no such thing as a non-teaching principal, assistant principal, coordinator, specialist, or any other category of school employee who doesn't actually spend regular time on intellectual undertakings with groups of children.

2) Simplify the curriculum and make it intelligent. The purpose which confinement schooling can be most productively turned to is the development of the intellect. Such development is valuable for everyone and my long experience with ghetto kids taught me they are as capable of this development as any. Every other purpose schooling has been turned to is better accomplished *outside* of school, with the time freed up by taking a sledgehammer to the current silliness and confusion; each child could have apprenticeships, internships, and independent study throughout the community in areas of their own deepest concern.

3) Let no school exceed a few hundred in size. Time to shut the factory schools forever. They are hideously expensive to maintain, they degrade the children they encompass, they hurt the neighborhoods in which they stand, they present ready markets for every kind of commercial hanky-panky. If schools were miniaturized a lot of worthless businesses would go belly-up on the spot. Make schools small and make them independent and autonomous. Everyone knows that is the right way, but not everyone knows that it is the inexpensive way, too. And make these small schools local. Curtail busing, neighborhoods need their own children and vice versa.

And let us save ourselves a fortune although the construction industry will scream bloody murder. Let us recognize there is no proper shape for a school building, schools can be anywhere and look like anything. In a very short time desktop computers will allow libraries of information to be everywhere, too, and contact with the best minds in every pursuit. Then what will the excuse for schools become?

4) Sharply constrict the power and size of state Departments of Education and large-city centralized school boards. They are a paradise for grifters and grafters and even if they were not their long-range interventions are irrelevant at best and horribly damaging at worst—in addition to being expensive. Decentralize school down to the neighborhood school level. In that one bold move families would be given control over the professionals in their children's lives. Each school under this governance would have its own citizen managing board elected from among neighbors. And full autonomy in purchasing and curriculum decisions. That's not a new idea, that's the way we had it for hundreds of years during which this country schooled–and educated–quite well.

5) Get rid of standardized tests completely. Measure accomplishment by performance, most often performance against a personal standard, not ranking against a class or larger entity. Standardized tests don't work. Is that news to anybody? What a scam! They correlate with nothing of human value, their very existence perverts curriculum into an advance preparation for the extravagant ritual administration of the tests. Is this a good thing? Why do you think that? If you don't then why do you put up with it? Would you hire a newspaper reporter on the basis of his test scores in journalism? Would you hire a hair stylist who had an "A" average in Beauty School? Wouldn't you ask for a demonstration? I hope so. The fact is nobody is crazy enough to hire anyone on the basis of grades and test scores for important work with one glaring exception—government jobs, and government licensing. The reason for that is that tests are poor predictors of the future *unless* the competition is rigged in advance by only allowing people who score well on tests to have jobs. That is the whole sorry story of the government licensing racket in this century.

6) End the teacher certification monopoly which is only kept alive by illicit agreement between teacher institutes and the state legislature. It makes colleges rich, it supports an army of unnecessary occupational titles, and it deprives children and unlicensed but competent adults from having valuable educational connections with each other.

Once again, it's hard to break the *illusion* that certification is there to protect the children so let me help. Think of this: the legendary private schools of this nation, Exeter, Andover, St.Paul's, Groton, Culver Military, wouldn't dream of restricting *themselves* to certified teachers. Why should *we*? Let anyone who can demonstrate performance competency before a citizen board, a parent body, or a group of students then be licensed to teach.

7) Restore the primary experience base we have stolen from kid's lives. Kids need to do, not sit in chairs. The school diet of confinement, test worship, bell addiction, and dependence on low-grade secondary experience in the form of semi-literate printed material cracks children away from their own innate understanding of how to learn and why. Let children engage in real tasks, not synthetic games and simulations. Field curriculum, critical thinking, apprenticeships, team projects, independent study, actual jobs, and other themes of primary experience must be restored to the life of the young.

8) Install permanent parent and community facilities in every school, in a prominent place near the front office. We need to create a tidal movement of real life in and out of the dead waters of school. Open these places on a daily basis to family and other community resource people and rig these rooms with appropriate equipment to allow parent partnerships with their own kids. Frequently release kids from classwork to work with their own parents, frequently substitute parents and other adults for professional staff in classrooms, too.

9) Understand clearly that total schooling is psychologically and procedurally unsound. Give children some private time, some private space, some choice of subjects, methods, and even

the company they keep. Does that sound like a college? It is meant to. Human beings, a group of which children are a part, do not do well under constant surveillance and tabulation. Keep from numbering, ranking, and labelling kids so the human being can't be seen under the weight of the numbers.

10) Teach children to think critically so they can challenge the hidden assumptions of the world around them including the assumptions of the school world. This type of thinking power has always been at the center of the world's elite educational systems. Policy makers are taught to think, the rest of the mass is not or is only taught partially. We could end this age-old means of social control in several short generations. What a society would look like where education instead of schooling happened for everyone I have no more idea than you do, but it would restore the exhilarating flux in human affairs we had in the early Federal period of this nation's history under President Jackson—before the dead hand of state schooling closed the door on it. Well, I said ten suggestions, but here's one more, number eleven:

11) We have to get down to business and provide legitimate choices to people, schooling can indeed be compulsory but education requires volition, anti-compulsion is essential to become educated—there is no one right way to do it nor is there one right way to grow up successfully, either. That kind of thinking has had a century and abundant treasure to prove itself and what it has done is to prove itself a fraud.

The word "public" in our form of public education has not had real meaning for a long time; public schooling will make a comeback when we strip control from the Egyptian pyramid of dubious experts and *force* our government to return full free market choice to the people. This is the only curriculum of necessity we need to see imposed by compulsion on everyone, the return of decision-making power to individuals and families. I hope we won't have to use guns to bring this second American revolution about.

A Different Kind Of Teacher

I want to show you a simple system to bring about a transformation of American education inside a decade without any cost to the taxpayer. It consists of five substantial alterations in the character of schoolteacher as we have come to know her since the end of one-room schoolhouse days.

The first of these is an insistence that only whole and recognizably independent personalities be accepted as worthy to display themselves before young people for long stretches of time. These personalities cannot be interchangeable in any school but should run the gamut from quiet to dramatic; all being well defined and at ease with who they are. The personnel policy, this deviation from tradition and the ones which follow it will signal, is paramount to any new school formulation. We all need to stop pretending that what a teacher *is* is less important than the subject. Without compulsion the pretense might be true, but with compulsion the character of the most proximate compeller is more important than anything else.

My second change is to demand that teachers use their private judgement to reject stupid books, materials and tests, and that they reveal enough command of critical tools to show why a particular book is terrible. Consensus in these affairs destroys the mind. I can clearly remember one of the most successful lessons I ever taught to a group of Harlem kids tagged as third-class goods; I taught them to recognize the inadequacy of a glossy new history text meant for "gifted and talented" classes, bearing Pulitzer winner Daniel Boorstin's name. By showing them how to do a content analysis of the book: by examining the index instead of the table of contents, and by counting text lines devoted to each index entry we were able to determine that the category "rockets" (of little historical consequence) got fully twice the space the economic system "capitalism" did. And there were dozens of similar anomalies. We were able to penetrate the fiction this book was teaching a balanced look at American history and force it to reveal what it really was teaching: an agglomeration of politically correct "bits" assembled through market research, with the intention (hopefully) of entertaining its audience but not inducing it to struggle for understanding.

The third step is to insist each individual teacher exercise sovereignty over the architecture of his own curriculum and sequencing, which would then be posted as consumer information so students and parents could freely pick and choose among the offerings. Or opt for something entirely different, self-generated. This is the original American libertarian tradition in action, one which argues the best society arises from trust-

ing people to make their own mistakes, not meddling interminably in their lives, even for their own good. This tradition ended with Andrew Jackson. I want it restored.

The fourth step is to demand that teachers always say what *they* think makes sense, never transmitting undigested the words of others.

And the fifth step is for schoolteachers to know themselves and know the limits and dangers of institutions. The thinkers who founded the United States were acutely aware of a dangerous side of schooling, a fact which goes a long way to explain why schooling isn't mentioned at all or even hinted at in the *Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights*, while weapons are. The founders understood something about liberty we have forgotten.

I made some progress doing each of these things in my 30 years as a schoolteacher, but I doubt if many would disagree with my gloomy instinct that the possibility we will see such a constellation fully in action any time soon in our schools is zero.

And yet the paradox: we won't get different schools from the same old teachers any more than we'll get a different piece of cake with the same old recipe. Nor will we even understand the kind of teachers we need until it is clear what's been missing right from the beginning in the teaching occupation. "Whom the gods hate they make schoolmasters," said Lucian, who lived in ancient Rome.

Let me start then with the idea something vital is missing and the absence of some necessary vitality accounts for sarcasm like Lucian's. One problem is the sheer *quantity* of rotten remarks about teaching; you can't explain Lucian without explaining Ichabod Crane nearly two thousand years later, or a thousand other sorry Ichabods embedded deeply in every literature of the West. And you have to find the underlying cause if you want to change things.

Last week I picked up the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, a daily paper, in a luncheonette near Vassar. Over coffee I started to read a piece by an actor, entitled "The Actor's Mind." Fine, I said, tell me something about acting. But here is how the thing opened: "As a young man in high school facing my future I only knew one career I *didn't* want, and that was a schoolteacher's."

Ouch! What on earth is going on? Where is the beloved pedagogue of official fantasy, where is the world of Ellwood Cubberly? To the civilian population we are regarded as people to be seen but not heard in public affairs, and at best folks to be patronized in private ones.

What makes this disrespect doubly chilling is that pedagogy is the single most generally *watched* line of work in the world. Unlike busdriving or restaurant work we demand attention be paid to the practitioner, so nearly everybody at one time or another has *watched* what we do because nearly everybody in the world was ordered to be locked in with us from early childhood until early adulthood. We can't claim people think badly of us because they don't know what we are about. They know all too well.

There are a few exceptions to this indictment I've just laid, none of them unambiguous. Not even James Hilton's bittersweet *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, which can easily be read as a testimonial to the unlived life quite as much as a tribute to quiet heroism.

Now, come back to the puzzle

aspect of this. Not only has there been historical and literary dissatisfaction with teachers from an outsider's point of view but also substantial restlessness from inside professional ranks. Year after year we witness large turnover among those lucky enough to have career options. In the wealthy Manhattan school district where I worked, teachers come and go like leaves in Autumn. And everywhere schools exist a secret standard exists, too, that the most desirable "teaching" jobs are those involving little or no contact with children. Are we willing to face the significance of that or shall we deny that it is true?

If schools are to break from 20th century school tradition, if schools are to be more successful than our familiar ones, I suspect the key will reside in a new kind of person to lead the class, not in technology or fancy routines. Whatever is wrong it is unavoidable that colleges and teacher certification procedures have been unable to fix it. I should have thought a century of failure would by now have exposed the science of pedagogy as legedermain.

The premise there exists some scientific formula by which a good teacher can be "trained", as if he were a flea or a circus dog, is absolute hokum. Neither Lucian nor Washington Irving would have trouble recognizing the up-to-date scientific schoolmaster: university trained, state certified, expert driven, foundation tickled, as the Sophist or Ichabod in modern drag. Our bad eggs of yesteryear are on the breakfast menu this very morning; although their shells are decorated in Benneton colors they taste the same. Most restructuring schemes floating around do not reach into the heart of the problem: We need to reinvent the teacher. We need teachers we never had.

I know a famous public school in an Ivy League town regarded as a model of experimental success. The place is small, the governance democratic, positive interaction with the community is a constant. Here you find the customary school mind raised to its highest degree of excellence, but in no way less committed to government schooling.

By accident I got insight into this mind while I was giving a two-day workshop, "The Empty Child", at the Omega Institute recently. I mentioned the school favorably only to have a student say: "My son went there. What he remembers most was being forced to take state-ordered standardized tests he felt were illegitimate. He cooked up a personal project completely in accord with the stated independent ideals of this school. His plan was simple, he deliberately missed every question; if you know these tests you know that isn't easy to do. He worked on mastering the test in advance, then deconstructed what he knew. A dramatic stunt like that could get into the papers and spread like wildfire, of course. It's not inconceivable such an idea spreading could collapse the testing empire.

"But the Director and the teachers turned my son into a public enemy. They not only screamed at him but passed the word around that the school got many special privileges because it scored well on standardized tests, so my son's action, by lowering the average of the school, was jeopardizing everyone's good deal."

The lesson I want you to read from this story is how to see behind the disguises of school reform. Teachers are not the main terms in schooling equations even in "alternative" situations. In ev-

ery important matter concerning public policy they are agents of the State or they are fired. The rest is window dressing.

Because of their youth, kids have not been thoroughly enough indoctrinated to miss this. They slowly discern that teachers are shills. Once that process of identification is complete the game is over. So it is this "agency" reality, hiding behind a mask of three million apparently independent teacher identities, which subjects pedagogical employees to scorn. Bad actors in a game of liar's poker. Teachers are not who they pretend to be.

The ones who remain in teaching for any considerable time, barring a few saboteurs and loonies who slip through the net, are instruments of policy made in remote chambers by unknown men. Many things conspire to conceal this reality, at the head of the list the curious certification mechanism which favors young and tractable acolytes who are then licensed for long-term, seminary-like confinement away from the world and each other. It is a weird, almost unbelievable, quasi-monastic commitment of a lifetime for those who stay because school is a black hole where experience is concerned. Aging occurs, but maturity seldom.

Another factor protecting the teacher disguise is the shallow nature of intellectual enterprise in schools: ideas are broken into fragments called subjects, subjects into fragments called units, units into sequence fragments, sequences into lesson fragments, lessons into bits and homework, and all these prefabricated pieces combine to make a school teacher-proof. The lack of intellectual ambition forced on schoolteachers and students alike produces a smallness of personal presence. This is reinforced by a symphony of ringing bells, outside interventions, testing, counseling, announcements, special events, assemblies, fire drills. Even well-meaning and knowledgeable teachers are sabotaged by the hostile indifference of children synthetically ripped from a living world and confined to ugly chairs. The historical truth that children read Plato and Shakespeare almost as easily as Mother Goose is buried as deeply as Troy VIIa under the detritus of schooling.

Most teachers don't treat themselves or their work seriously enough to run afoul of people who make policy. Think of science teachers who must teach the way they are told, though to do so is the antithesis of what science means. Teachers in their role as agents (not scientists) sell ritual procedures and memorization as Science to kids who will never know any better. A different kind of teacher would set out to help kids design original experiments, test hypotheses, search for truth and the elimination of historical error. Imagine millions of children unleashed to follow the road to discovery in millions of uniquely personal ways. A breathtaking image. Of course any teacher who really did that would be fired.

It might help you to see my point if I supply a pedestrian comparison between teachers as agents of the State and a surgeon as independent businessman. If this surgeon told you that your kidney had to be removed and presented a compelling case, no barrier, other than your own agreement, would stand in the way of a permanent, perhaps fatal, alteration of your life. This would be true even if another less convincing surgeon energetically advised you to keep both kidneys in place and laughed at your

funeral.

Now consider the very different reception a schoolteacher would receive who prescribed three days of independent study per week for a particular student and only two days of class. Assume for this exercise that student and family both enthusiastically supported the teacher prescription. Who could allow it without risk? A principal? A District Superintendent? The state education department? Could the local school board dispense such permissions on a case by case basis? The teacher union? The dean of a teacher college? A court? The Federal Department of Education?

Except by the expedient of winking an eye none of these agencies has the power to release an individual from the lockstep march risk-free; each might be battered by violent political attack. Only an act of the state legislature, which would take years to lobby, could release the prescribing teacher from jeopardy. The radical powerlessness of schoolpeople is reflected in this modest example of teacher-tinkering. A surgeon may tinker with a kidney more easily than a teacher may tinker with the school compulsion law. The potential upheaval in our economy that would occur simply by weakening attendance compulsion is so vast no hireling can be allowed to waive it.

Schoolteachers can't move any great distance in the direction they think best for individual students. Human nature being what it is, people harnessed to a collectivized regimen soon give up thinking seriously about real people as real and one of a kind. This is so regardless of what they may say or even wish were true. The two-faced aspect of schoolteachers forced into constant pretenses of caring, forced to act as main characters when they are agents, forced to pretend that insignificant work has important connections with human development—these deficits are major causes of the low regard teaching has been held in since Plato's *Protagoras* spelled out precisely what was flawed in the dogma of Protagoras, the Sophist.

With all this mental baggage in my closet you can see why I jumped at the chance to go to a "teacher formation" retreat in Weyzata, Minnesota, sponsored by the Fetzer Institute. If our present weary school-reform hysteria is not to end where all the others have ended—in more of the same—it will be necessary to put the bell on the cat of school restructuring. Alterations in time, place, text, sequencing, etc. will not be enough. The historic schoolteacher will corrupt new structures just by being himself.

The human reality of schoolteaching has to be drastically changed because Teacher as we have him has neither power nor dignity enough to be a worthy associate of young people growing up. As I said earlier, we're going to have to find teachers we never had. Because that goal sounds so unreachable and yet to my way of thinking is not, I went to the teacher formation conference because I felt I would have something useful to say. What follows is the sixth draft of a letter I keep sending to the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan as my thinking sharpens in stages in the time since we met.

The letter examines a crucial aspect of alternative teaching, the struggle to be a whole person, to be real. Pinocchio's cry. It is the notion of teaching as some specialized function we have to root out; the chemical wedding

of two abstract and damaging *roles*, "teacher" and "student", is the principal cause of the deserved bad feeling toward schoolteachers.

Dear Fetzers:

The first thing a teacher has to be is a whole person because teachers teach who they are. That is the main thing they teach. If they are incomplete they reproduce their incompleteness in the students. All the effort I ever spent on becoming a better teacher was spent directly on becoming a better me. Institutions can and do prevent people from becoming whole by imposing machine directive and machined logic on human life, but there is not very much in a positive sense that can be done institutionally to make education happen short of getting out of the way. Centralized prescriptions for conduct don't work because everyone's way of becoming whole is different. It happens from the inside out like a peach ripening; if you try to force it synthetically it turns out badly. At best you can arrange some conditions that seem to promote success and respond when your experience tells you to engage the learner, or when the learner wants to engage you. The rest is out of your hands.

Anyone willing to think hard about the matter will realize there can hardly exist a bona fide procedure called teacher training. The idea is based on a military bright idea by General Helmuth von Moltke of Prussia who established the correct way to train a mass army lay in originating all orders with staff experts and rigidly executing them in a field command. Teacher training was a Prussian invention too, supposed to make the State educational plan impervious to local thinking. That part of it worked, Prussian teachers were allowed nothing personal nor substantive to teach. The net result is the school world around us because the Prussian plan has been our own plan for just about a century; there are cosmetic differences, mostly rhetorical, but the Prussian intention and the ultimate deadening effect on individual thinking are both the same.

Teacher training locks the presumptive professional mind into an official straitjacket; it arrests development instead of enhancing it, it prevents men and women from becoming competent adults.

The reason these programs survive in the face of universal criticism is because they are the surest instrument to provide policy-makers with dependent employees, which Durkeim's sociology had proven were the only dependable kind. Under the glittering skin of the new "Outcomes Based Education" thrust one may readily detect the same beating heart. "Trained" teachers are the most reliable way to manage this, although just ahead a new wave of very high-tech classrooms promises to regulate student training much better than teachers can. Teacher training will at that moment come mostly to mean training classroom attendants to tend machinery which will do the actual training of children.

Teachers teach who they are. They can hardly teach much of anything else if you consider the matter carefully. The kids I had the most profound effect upon as a teacher were invariably those who were incomplete in the same way I had been at their age and those who lacked certain strengths I was struggling myself to learn as an adult. I taught these kids best because I was really teaching

myself. Our mutual attempts to solve our own character problems, mine included, were the field on which we wrote some notable *academic* successes.

I am suggesting from my experience that much of the expensive attention given to prepared curricula, officially approved materials, formal spaces, testing, various specialized licenses, and the rest of usual school rigmarole is irrelevant. It isn't the way learning what we need to know happens. *Teaching* is some kind of connection between people, not rules on a piece of paper; a teacher teaches you how to learn principally by learning himself. Teaching is a continuous *display* of right living/thinking—at least great teaching is. Not some trick of information processing. This is why great parents are the greatest teachers of all. Parents don't communicate with the fruit of their loins through drills, blackboard notes, or worksheets. But through dynamic illustrations of who they are, what is important to them, what they are willing to suffer for.

I assume a natural urge exists in all of us to become *complete*, an urge frustrated by squandering too much time obeying the urgencies of other people. This is true for teachers, true for students. A better deal for teachers will begin by building social architecture around them to allow constant personal growth, and, if that can't be done, teaching them how to sabotage the shackles constraining them. If we are candid with each other, we'll admit the characteristic most prominent among most of the millions who teach school is that they are childlike and incomplete. By teaching who they are such people inadvertently do harm.

At the start teachers are probably a cut or two *above* most other working groups. Constant confinement with unhappy children, sterile workplaces, dependence on routines, mechanical sequencing, low grade intellectual material, the tintinnabulation of bells, lack of privacy, relentless isolation from colleagues, exclusion from policy-making—all these stigmata of inferior status catch up to them quickly. If they didn't *enter* the business childlike and incomplete (which the practice of hiring unformed young people straight from college about ensures), then the culture of classroom and teachers' room will make them that way or drive them into school administration.

I know there must be schools you think are exceptions to this indictment, perhaps your own, but I have to disagree with you because no school agency is strong enough to guarantee unconditional integrity of the sanctuary you are thinking of. Of course there *are* places where teachers are given room (because of some personal philosophy of the principal or some character of the community), trouble is that when fundamental rights depend on someone's whim you really have no rights, only privileges which may be withdrawn at any minute. The illusion is only sustained by ignoring the real price paid in deference and dishonesty. That was my point about the public experimental school mentioned earlier. It was a place with its feet securely anchored in a contradiction, a place of pretenses which worked just as long as nobody came too close to the barbed wire.

Better than nothing, some of you will say, and I'd probably agree. But I can't be allowed to admit it without investing any faith at all that systematic change will come from that direction.

From "replicating successful models". Haven't we heard that phony tune long enough? Schools rooted in liberal administrations where authorities wink a lot are only a trick to vent pressure which could otherwise blow systematic schooling apart. Special teachers in this sort of experiment last until the key administrator retires, then are smoked out as the result of some mistake—as Jaime Escalante was smoked out of Garfield High for his mistake of revealing how simple a matter academic success really is.

The idea of schools which bend individual will to State will comes out of northern Germany at the beginning of the 19th century. No, that's wrong, the *practice* comes from there, the idea has been with the human race, unpracticed, for all of recorded history. And out of Comte's France a short time afterwards came a formula to create a teacher proletariat to serve State will even more efficiently. This proletariat was to be drawn from people as light as air, people who would do as told. Above all, docility and compliance were sought. This original formula was soon improved upon by drawing the teacher corps from the ranks of tractable *women* and elevating some of the men to positions of small authority as school administrators beholden to powerful men behind the scenes for their good job.

By 1910 this lot was the common lot of schools thanks to patronage and leadership from Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, and a relatively small handful of other powerful men. It has hardly changed a stick since then in spite of generations of school reformers—including the present crop.

If it annoys you to hear the names of great robber barons associated with the shape of modern schooling the best I can say is that the history of 20th century American schooling is still largely unwritten because no one dares. But all the John Deweys and John Goodlads have very little to do with how we school, only with how we talk about it.

School happens *in spite of* the thinking and opinions of those who regard themselves in control of the operation. Telling children what they may think is too economically critical an undertaking to allow schools to determine what that should be. School is set up to level human differences but contrarily to *stratify* oncoming generations so they might be more easily managed by carrot/stick and other divide and conquer methods. To work, "school" must be pretty fairly uniform. And there's the rub. Uniformity only arises in abstraction, reality is quite singular; whole people can only serve an abstract idea by changing it to suit their own particularity; the center of any real person can never be the urgency of any official body. Whole people resist being told what to do and so are natural enemies of schooling. Schools know this, hence a social technology which deconstructs wholeness. There is no way to reconcile this tension easily.

Regular meetings with age-graded children in cellblock rooms in featureless buildings is an idea out of the German *Bauhaus*. What it does to grownups struggling to be adults isn't pleasant to see, nor are its long-term effects easily reversible. Please don't bring images to mind of slum schools; it is Boonton and Bronxville I am thinking of. A few passing encounters with other grownups in the same shed each day doesn't provide ballast enough. Teachers threaten to leave the ground at any minute because

they are unbearably light. Watch them on a windy day.

It's not a matter of intelligence or good will. If a person enters the business with no worthy skills that command respect, no powerful family ties, no deeply rooted personal culture, no traditions, no sense of God, no familiarity with real work, and no independent nature, it will be virtually impossible to acquire those attributes on the job, yet what a shamble occurs when partial people are locked up with children, desperate to grow up whole and conscious of the relentless clock ticking. Tick-tock, Tick-tock.

Doesn't every mother and father have a right to protect their own children from association with people like this?

Mary Foley, a somewhat famous (by now) mother of four children on Cape Cod was not taken to court by the Barnstable Superintendent for refusing to send her children to school, (legal because Massachusetts allows homeschooling) but for refusing to report to the Superintendent what exactly she was *doing* at home. Which was illegal. She said in a statement to the court (1993): "If we are not free to educate our children our liberty is an illusion. I do not have a curriculum. I have never used one. The state does not have the power to standardize children. My education philosophy precludes the use of a curriculum. My method has been successful enough to produce a daughter who is a member of the National Honor Society and twin sons who tested in the top one percent on a national placement test for two consecutive years. The priorities of our curriculum are daydreaming, natural and social sciences, self-discipline, respect of self and others, and making mistakes."

Mrs. Foley is the kind of schoolteacher, no other, that Fetzer should be trying to form, one who might find the secret of teaching the way children learn and the courage to do so in spite of what the government directs. I wouldn't want my own children with any other kind of teacher.

But by following the premises of traditional teacher training we have worked ourselves into a mess so deep that tens of millions of schoolchildren are bewildered and tens of millions of grownups, well-schooled every one, wander about the landscape bewildered, utterly unable to do much of anything for themselves at all. Fetzer can help form teachers like Mary by deciding what whole human beings like Mary add up to that is irreducible—and exploring how they got that way.

Once our common goal becomes the vision and reality of whole human lives, a much smaller task, that of forming good teachers, will take care of itself. Complete human beings, like fingerprints, are always drawn on an original plan; they arise from realization of a design innate in a particular human soul. Hanging out with whole people (if you are so lucky) doesn't teach you how to be like them, but like yourself.

High time to deep-six the silly idea children are blank tablets or sufficiently plastic material to be stretched to fit some bureaucrat's plan. The formulations of Rousseau, Helvetius, Wundt, Skinner, and most recently Spady's crowd, lead to fantastic schemes which mutilate human nature in order to serve abstract purposes, the construction of some image of a future society. Attractive as these schemes can be made to sound, all stray far from the thread of

individual meaning which made Western society the most powerful model in human history—not perfect yet by any means but moving in the right direction.

Utopian blueprints served up unwittingly by schoolpeople are ghostly backdrops for angry conflicts between children and schoolteachers through this century. The sudden wasting of the Soviet Union ought to be sobering proof that human nature is an *enduring* phenomenon, not very plastic at all, much stronger than tricks of psychologists or intimidations of governments. In the dramatic mirror of central planning's folly we see reflected the tragedy of teachers who act as servo-mechanisms of the institution, dragging children and families further and further from any sustaining human reality. Nature is the eternal guide not social directives from short-lived cosmic thinkers. Fetzers, if you are to help *form* teachers then you have to raise your sights and form *people* who possess personal sovereignty. Mental and spiritual quality. We all potentially possess those things until people who tinker with our lives take them away.

You may think I've overstated the case of incompleteness but if so, what else explains the vast silence of three million teachers on policy matters in education? Or their silence on political matters generally, ever since the licensed occupation of schoolmaster was born? Don't offer the "Union" voice in rebuttal; collectives like teacher unions are at best some pale average of limited material interests, not human richness. So if you disagree with my case so far, answer me: What accounts for this terrible phenomenon? Why *don't* people who make their living in schools play a role in public affairs?

But if you do agree, then shouldn't a teacher formation program try to give these mute millions back their tongues? In ancient times slaves set to guard state secrets were silenced by having their tongues torn out. I don't think it's good public policy to have silent schoolteachers.

Another thing. Doesn't your intuition tell you that the physical immobility and isolation of teachers can't lead to anything good? And the regulated time and constant surveillance and subordination? Remember, after they do whatever it is they do to children, teachers have to come out into the light of day and live among us all, but their normal work routines leave them with anti-human habits hard to overcome.

You teach who you are. You teach who you are and were as a son or daughter, that's an important part of completing your own humanity and a necessary link with the world's most fundamental institution, the family. You teach who you are as a parent yourself and as a relation; if you aren't these things you teach why not, and teach what you've made of yourself in their place? Even if never a word is said, you teach these things loud and clear.

I've started with some very human components of a complete man/woman because they are ones we customarily ignore. If you make a list of the parts of a complete life each will suggest definite steps in their direction which involve reading, writing, numbers, critical thinking, rhetoric, science, fine and practical arts, etc. I'm going to take a stab at this without any pretense of comprehensiveness. The following is what came into my mind after ten or twenty minutes thinking, a different list or a different method of attack might well

come into yours.

A provisional archetype of a complete person

A complete person must be simultaneously:

A student
A neighbor
A teacher
A craftsman
An administrator
An artist
A policy-maker
An adventurer
A religious philosopher
An engineer
A citizen active
A naturalist
A private person
A creator
A philanthropist
An entrepreneur
A son or daughter
A servant
A parent or proto-parent
A master
A multiple relative
A friend
A family historian
A judge
A gambler
A sportsman
A fighter
A lover
An advocate and guardian
A scientist

And any complete person has a dark side, too; people who seem to be too good to be true *are* too good to be true. That's why children don't trust teachers, although they couldn't put the idea into words. They know we lie because they can look inside themselves and their parents and see the dark side. Either they are demi-monsters or we are liars.

So, Fetzers, you will help form good teachers by helping prospective teacher candidates replace parts they have lost or never had. Helping re-member their common humanity, the list I just cited contains many of the arms and legs we need to sew back on. And whole teachers will inevitably make the very same things central parts of any curriculum they teach to children. For without straining toward wholeness in students what is the point of teaching at all besides a paycheck? Mary Foley, the embattled Cape Cod mother quoted earlier, continued her defense to the court by writing that her own curriculum was best expressed by the poet Blake:

> To see a world in a grain of sand,
> And Heaven in a wild flower
> To hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And Eternity in an hour.

Both Mary Foley quotations are taken from a short essay, "Mary Foley's Curriculum," printed in *The Blumenfeld Education Letter* Volume 8, Number 9 (September 1993—Boise, Idaho).

Now all I wrote so far was an end I consciously worked for throughout my teaching career: to make myself whole. I can't say I totally succeeded but I never stopped trying. That helps to explain the otherwise shocking confession that nothing I did in the classroom wasn't directly useful to me. Nothing in 30 years wasn't primarily aimed at filling in holes I perceive in my own makeup. This is a precise description of how I approach my teaching on a daily basis, with the question always, "What's in this

for me?"

The fallout from my struggles to become whole is the only thing I have to give my students. The normative model of teaching we are all familiar with, on the other hand, the insane hierarchical ministration model, was nominally a gift to the 20th century of G. Stanley Hill, Frederick Taylor, Dr. Thorndyke, and a number of other men. It is an ugly and expensive lie to try to maintain into a new century. You simply cannot be someone else's minister *unless they choose you*; this lesson every counselor knows, schoolmen have never learned. You can't order people about too long without ruining their value as whole human beings.

If I were in Fetzer's position I'd try to spend my dollars to maximum effect by determining who had the most to contribute to a man or a woman thinking about teaching. I almost said "young man or woman" but that would fly in the face of everything I've argued up to this point. We need people who have proven themselves as people to teach our kids, not green and unformed graduates of our colleges, although there are notable exceptions. After I'd identified these counselors I'd assemble them and the candidates in some retreat where they could interact productively.

So who would make the best teachers of teachers?

I think we should start with old people coming to the end of their lives who have been reflecting for years about who they've been and what they've seen. Who could better call attention to what really matters and where our form of schooling deviates from it? They could use their own lives to illustrate where teaching hit the mark and where it missed. What could they have been helped to know that now, at the end, they realize was missing?

Here is noble work and real status for millions of the aged. Let them teach us. Pay them to teach us. Surely no one believes we can learn how to be whole on our own without listening closely to the voices of age. An engineer would call this feedback. Schooling has lacked provision for it throughout its sad history.

I hope you can you see how valuable secrets of the old will be, yet how ignorant all of us are in this area because we've allowed a false vision of expertise to guide our practice. In what sense does taking a dozen graduate courses and writing a thesis make someone an expert? This is another German nightmare and a dangerous one which has written the history of our century in blood. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the second world war the inevitable result of successful schooling, and Erich Maria Remarque said the first world war was too. Jacques Ellul has informed us the group most easily swayed by propaganda is the well-schooled one. You don't really need attribution to know these things are true, do you?

The resource hidden away in our aged is inexhaustible and cheaper to tap than the minds of certified experts. There are many questions of vital importance *only* the old can answer. Where we have strayed furthest from the human path, and what that path is, common people facing death will understand best.

Another grand resource never yet tapped in our society lies in the stories told by failed schoolteachers struggling to understand their failure. Inmy own teaching I learned nothing from graduate credits, little from good teachers, but

got a world of insight from bad teachers, some of whom became my close friends. Find these people, most will still be in the classroom. Full of bitterness or shame. They spoke to me, they will speak to you. If they think you care to hear. They will sing a song to you of who they might have been and why they were not.

But the single most magnificent resource this business overlooks, one all the fancy conferences and foundations, retreats and colloquia overlook, is the huge number of children oppressed by schooling. We ignore them I think because we dare not look them in the eye and acknowledge their right to rage at the extremity of the torment we inflict upon them.

Even a shallow reading of school history from primary sources and secondary (outside of the house histories of Cubberly and Cremin though it is possible to read between the lines in both) will disclose to a searching mind that our nation's children were locked up in schools in the service of religious and philosophical obsessions held by a few sects who used to boast of their authorship of schools before the emerging character of their invention shut them up. These religious obsessions suited the economic and political plans of hard-headed men, and so they were supported. School did not happen through any democratic will of the public; the myth of common schools is an emperor wearing no clothes.

So hardly ever hold a teacher formation get-together without many children in attendance as delegates. And don't patronize them. When I spoke at the Spokane homeschool convention last Fall, 600 of the 1,500 attendees were children of all ages, fully participating in the proceedings. The energy released was so dazzling and proper I had a chance to see a little into the world a different kind of schoolteacher can bring about. And I was chastened by what I saw.

The point of view of the victims of this failed institution is the very best and most potent tool with which to fashion teachers who might change it if they were allowed—not the insights of Piaget or the mechanisms of Bill Spady. Time to discard the hold of people who hold this business tight against their chests, time to discount the advice of people who make a good living out of schooling as it is, time to jettison true believers entirely.

Only with complete people or those dedicated to the struggle for personal, not collective, sovereignty can we realistically begin to talk about a different kind of schoolteacher. Without those, school reform is a silly waste of time. How people are made complete deserves to be near the center of your initial focus. Good luck to you at the Fetzer Institute.

.....John Taylor Gatto

This is the latest thing I wrote to the Fetzer Institute and I'm still not completely satisfied. I realize some of you will ask: "But where is the *positive* program? What does he want?" The answer to that is I would have all of us break free from the fantasy there is any acceptable "expert" answer at all. Not from me, and not from you. If you stop worrying about what some expert at Brown or Harvard has to say you can regard the what and why of learning with fresh and private eyes the way homeschoolers do—there are too many right answers to classify.

After this medicine of *personal* solutions begins to work you will never again be able to hear the principal voices of current school reform without detecting *sotte voce* their institutional affiliations. And the hidden agenda of institutional preservation which unites them more than any other single thing. Try it, you'll see I'm telling the truth.

Between 1865 and 1890, as a direct result of Northern victory in the Civil War, and determination on the part of a few men to build an efficient industrial state, a plan to systematize the rearing of the young after an ancient dream of Plato, updated by Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, was drawn up and thoroughly articulated. The motives for such a radical change in American temper were set down most eloquently in a series of 11 essays written by the industrial tycoon Andrew Carnegie, gathered loosely under the umbrella title, *The Gospel of Wealth.*

At the core of this social strategy was the removal important decisions from family and individual control. And the assignment of these rights to a multilayered legion of specialists, all wedded economically (and some ideologically) to the dream of a peculiar sort of welfare state which the Carnegie Foundation dubbed "welfare Capitalism." That is to say, traditional libertarian freedoms for the executive and entrepreneurial classes and a form of state socialism for the rest of us. In England this was called "Fabian Socialism,"—Robert Owen and Joan Ruskin were its patron saints. What we lost in freedom it was argued we would gain in security. This type of total society requires tight control over all forms of training available, a fact explaining the sudden advent of mass licensing shortly after this plan was quietly accepted.

An unintended but also unlamented byproduct of this otherwise successful rethinking of government was the wholesale breaking of human bonds to other people and particular places. You cannot have abstract loyalties without weakening or abandoning smaller ones. We were all made homeless by it. I think it was a bad bargain. Robert Frost was writing more than poetry when he wrote that good fences make good neighbors; without personal command over place, time and other invisible resources like the ability to freely associate, the ability to speak freely whomever you offend, and a very few other freedoms, life begins to bleed away its meaning. You can still walk around but you are dying. Children understand this wordlessly. Watch them.

The psychological effects of meaninglessness have proven impossible to deal with by any known therapy, and the growing number of angry, incomplete, amoral people provokes a modern crisis of political management. We are drowning in a sea of meaninglessness produced by several different rivers but none as important as government schools and government schoolteachers. The most striking evidence of this crisis is what has happened to our prison population. Currently we incarcerate 1.2 million men and women, and 2.8 million living adults are on parole or are ex-cons, one in every 65 citizens. What is most interesting about this figure is the chronology of its formation: prison statistics have been kept since colonial days and have shown a constant fraction from the very beginning until 1930 of 50 inmates for every 100,000 of the population.

In the measure of 1930 that constant

fraction changed suddenly to 100. By 1960 it was 200. By 1975, 300. By 1985, 400. And by 1993 we are approaching 500 criminally confined per 100,000 of population. This is formidable evidence of a system proceeding toward meltdown. The crisis in our schools and cities is not a crisis of reading and writing but a crisis of meaning. Until we decontrol our economy and localize it, not globalize it, localize it into thousands of independent communities; until we can decontrol our social system and localize it in the lives of individuals and families, not institutions, and until we cede that important life choices are not the proper province of any professional establishment, a profoundly dangerous cancer of meaninglessness will continue to grow. No central prescription unless it be turning off the machinery will get us a handle on what has gone wrong.

In 1949 Bertrand Russell pointed out in his book *Authority and the Individual* that the present tendencies toward centralization may well prove too strong to be resisted "until they have led to disaster". Perhaps, said Russell, "the whole system must break down, with all the inevitable results of anarchy and poverty, before human beings can again acquire that degree of personal freedom without which life loses its savor. I hope that this is not the case, but it certainly will be the case unless the danger is realized and unless vigorous measures are taken to combat it."

No such vigorous measures have been taken in the 43 years since Russell wrote that, but instead schools have led the race to achieve a perfect hive society, a hospital planet in which every tic and wen of human individuality can be scrutinized and treated. Twice before in Western history we have reached the condition of psychic oppression which institutionalization tends toward, once in the years that led to the breakup of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, and once in the years which led to the breakup of the Universal Christian Church in the 16th century. On both occasions an ocean of blood was shed and the dislocations attendant on this disintegration lasted for centuries. It may well be that we are on the threshold of a third such defining moment with the experience of Russia only an overture to a grander catastrophe.

Whatever the case, in such a moral intertidal zone as we now find ourselves any more official advice should be regarded with deep suspicion. The strongest message a teacher can deliver to children is a statement of his or her own aggressive independence. In this lies the formula for the different breed of schoolteacher we need and for schools we never had. Not people grateful for some administrative liberality or for the hollow promise of decision-making, but complete people who map their own course as surgeons do, or Mary Foley does.

The Public School A System Designed to Destroy Individual Thought!

I want you to consider the frightening possibility that we are spending far too much money on schooling, not too little. I want you to consider that we have too many people employed in interfering with the way children growup — and that all this money and all these people, all the time we take out of children's lives and away from their homes and families and neighbourhoods and private explorations — gets in the way of education. That seems radical, I know. Surely in modern technological society it is the quantity of schooling and the amount of money you spend on it that buys value.

And yet last year in St. Louis, I heard a vice-president of IBM tell an audience of people assembled to redesign the process of teacher certification that in his opinion this country became computer-literate byself-teaching, not through any action of schools. He said 45 million people were comfortable with computers who had learned through dozens of non-systematic strategies, none of them very formal; if schools had pre-empted the right to teach computer use we would be in a horrible mess right now instead of leading the world in this literacy.

Now think about Sweden, a beautiful, healthy, prosperous and up-to-date country with a spectacular reputation for quality in everything it produces. It makes sense to think their schools must have something to do with that.

Then what do you make of the fact that you can't go to school in Sweden until you are 7 years old? The reason the unsentimental Swedes have wiped out what would be first and second grades here is that they don't want to pay the large social bill that quickly comes due when boys and girls are ripped away from their best teachers at home too early. It just isn't worth the price, say the Swedes, to provide jobs for teachers and therapists if the result is sick, incomplete kids who can't be put back together again very easily.

The entire Swedish school sequence isn't 12 years, either — it's nine. Less schooling, not more. The direct savings of such a step in the US would be $75-100 billion, a lot of unforeclosed home mortgages, a lot of time freed up with which to seek an education.

Who was it that decided to force your attention onto Japan instead of Sweden? Japan with its long school year and state compulsion, instead of Sweden with its short school year, short school sequence, and free choice where your kid is schooled? Who decided you should know about Japan and not Hong Kong, an Asian neighbour with a short school year that outperforms Japan across the board in math and science?

Whose interests are served by hid-

ing that from you?

One of the principal reasons we got into the mess we're in is that we allowed schooling to become a very profitable monopoly, guaranteed its customers by the police power of the state.

Systematic schooling attracts increased investment only when it does poorly, and since there are no penalties at all for such performance, the temptation not to do well is overwhelming. That's because school staffs, both line and management, are involved in a guild system. And in that ancient form of association no single member is allowed to outperform any other member, none are allowed to advertise or to introduce new technology or improvise without the advance consent of the guild.

Violation of these precepts is severely sanctioned — as Marva Collins, Jaime Escalante and a large number of once-brilliant teachers found out.

The guild reality cannot be broken without returning primary decision-making to parents, letting them buy what they want to buy inschooling, and encouraging the entrepreneurial reality that existed until 1852.

That is why I urge any business to think twice before entering acooperative relationship with the schools we currently have. Cooperating with these places will only make them worse.

The structure of American schooling, 20th century style, began in 1806when Napoleon's amateur soldiers beat the professional soldiers of Prussia at the battle of Jena. When your business is selling soldiers, losing a battle like that is serious. Almost immediately afterwards a German philosopher named Fichte delivered his famous "Address to the German Nation," which became one of the most influential documents in modern history.

In effect he told the Prussian people that the party was over, that the nation would have to shape up through a new Utopian institution of forced schooling in which everyone would learn to take orders.

So the world got compulsory schooling at the end of a state bayonet for the first time in history; modern forced schooling started in Prussia in 1819 with a clear vision of what centralized schools could deliver:

1. Obedient soldiers to the army;
2. Obedient workers to the mines;
3. Well subordinated civil servants to government;
4. Well subordinated clerks to industry
5. Citizens who thought alike about major issues.

Schools should create an artificial national consensus on matters that had been worked out in advance by leading German families and the head of institutions. Schools should create unity among all the German states, eventually unifying them into Greater Prussia.

Prussian industry boomed from the beginning. She was successful in warfare and her reputation in international affairs was very high. Twenty-six years after this form of schooling began, the King of Prussia was invited to North America to determine the boundary between the United States and Canada.

Thirty-three years after that fateful invention of the central school institution, at the behest of Horace Mann and many other leading citizens, we borrowed the style of Prussian schooling as our own.

You need to know this because over the first 50 years of our school institution the Prussian purpose — which was

to create a form of state socialism — gradually forced out traditional American purpose, which in most minds was to prepare the individual to be self-reliant.

In Prussia the purpose of the Volksshule [citizen's school], which educated 92% of the children, was not intellectual development at all, but socialization in obedience and subordination.

Thinking was left to the Real Schulen, [real school] in which 8% of the kids participated. But for the great mass, intellectual development was regarded with managerial horror, as something that caused armies to lose battles.

Prussia concocted a method based on complex fragmentations to ensure that its school products would fit the grand social design. Some of this method involved dividing whole ideas into school subjects, each further divisible, some of it involved short periods punctuated by a horn so that self-motivation in study would be muted by ceaseless interruptions.

There were many more techniques of training, but all were built around the premise that isolation from first-hand information, and fragmentation of the abstract information presented by teachers, would result in obedient and subordinate graduates, properly respectful of arbitrary orders.

"Lesser" men would be unable to interfere with policy makers because, while they could still complain, they could not manage sustained or comprehensive thought. Well-schooled children cannot think critically, cannot argue effectively.

One of the most interesting by-products of Prussian schooling turned out to be the two most devastating wars of modern history.

Erich Maria Ramarque, in his classic "All Quiet on the Western Front," tells us that the First World War was caused by the tricks of schoolmasters, and the famous Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that the Second World War was the inevitable product of good schooling.

It's important to underline that Bonhoeffer meant that literally, not metaphorically — schooling using the Prussian system removes the ability of the mind to think for itself. It teaches people to wait for a teacher to tell them what to do and if what they have done is good or bad. Prussian teaching paralyses the moral will as well as the intellect. It's true that sometimes well-schooled students sound smart, because they memorize many opinions of great thinkers, but they actually are badly damaged because their own ability to think is left rudimentary and undeveloped.

We got from the United States to Prussia and back because a small number of very passionate ideological leaders visited Prussia in the first half of the 19th century, and fell in love with the order, obedience and efficiency of its system and relentlessly proselytized for a translation of Prussian vision onto these shores.

If Prussia's ultimate goal was the unification of Germany, our major goal, so these men thought, was the unification of hordes of immigrant Catholics into a national consensus based on a northern European cultural model. To do that children would have to be removed from their parents and from inappropriate cultural influences.

In this fashion, compulsory schooling, a bad idea that had been around at

least since Plato's "Republic," a bad idea that New England had tried to enforce in 1650 without any success, was finally rammed through the Massachusetts legislature in 1852.

It was, of course, the famous "Know-Nothing" legislature that passed this law, a legislature that was the leading edge of a famous secret society which flourished at that time known as "The Order of the Star Spangled Banner," whose password was the simple sentence, "I know nothing,"— hence the popular label attached to the secret society's political arm, "The American Party."

Over the next 50 years state after state followed suit, ending schools of choice and ceding the field to a new government monopoly. There was one powerful exception to this — the children who could afford to be privately educated.

[Although it may be relevant that not *all* private schools are geared to a "real" education, but are simply more of the same as the public schools, and are merely promoted as being for the elite.]

It's important to note that the underlying premise of Prussian schooling is that the government is the true parent of children — the State is sovereign over the family. At the most extreme pole of this notion is the idea that biological parents are really the enemies of their own children, not to be trusted.

How did a Prussian system of dumbing children down take hold in American schools?

Thousands and thousands of young men from prominent American families journeyed to Prussia and other parts of Germany during the 19th century and brought home the Ph. D. degree to a nation in which such a credential was unknown. These men pre-empted the top positions in the academic world, in corporate research, and in government, to the point where opportunity was almost closed to those who had not studied in Germany, or who were not the direct disciples of a German PhD, as John Dewey was the disciple of G. Stanley Hall at Johns Hopkins. Virtually every single one of the founders of American schooling had made the pilgrimage to Germany, and many of these men wrote widely circulated reports praising the Teutonic methods. Horace Mann's famous "7th Report" of 1844, still available in large libraries, was perhaps the most important of these.

By 1889, a little more than 100 years ago, the crop was ready for harvest. In that year the US Commissioner of Education, William Torrey Harris, assured a railroad magnate, Collis Huntington, that American schools were "scientifically designed" to prevent "over-education" from happening. The average American would be content with his humble role in life, said the commissioner, because he would not be tempted to think about any other role.

In 1896 the famous John Dewey, then at the University of Chicago, said that independent, self-reliant people were a counter-productive anachronism in the collective society of the future. In modern society, said Dewey, people would be defined by their associations — not by their own individual accomplishments. In such a world people who read too well or too early are dangerous because they become privately empowered, they know too much, and know how to find out what they don't know by themselves, without consulting experts.

Dewey said the great mistake of traditional pedagogy was to make reading and writing constitute the bulk of early schoolwork. He advocated that the phonics method of teaching reading be abandoned and replaced by the whole word method, not because the latter was more efficient (he admitted that it was less efficient), but because independent thinkers were produced by books — thinkers who cannot be socialized very easily.

By socialization Dewey meant a program of social objectives administered by the best social thinkers in government. This was a giant step on the road to state socialism, the form pioneered in Prussia, and it is a vision radically disconnected with the American past, its historic hopes and dreams.

Dewey's former professor and close friend, G. Stanley Hall, said this at about the same time, "Reading should no longer be a fetish. Little attention should be paid to reading."

Hall was one of the three men most responsible for building a gigantic administrative infrastructure over the classroom. How enormous that structure really became can only be understood by comparisons: New York State, for instance, employs more school administrators than all of the European Economic Community nations combined.

Once you think that the control of conduct is what schools are about, the word "reform" takes on a very particular meaning. It means making adjustments to the machine so that young subjects will not twist and turn so, while their minds and bodies are being scientifically controlled. Helping kids to use their minds better is beside the point.

Bertrand Russell once said that American schooling was among the most radical experiments in human history, that America was deliberately denying its children the tools of critical thinking.

When you want to teach children to think, you begin by treating them seriously when they are little, giving them responsibilities, talking to them candidly, providing privacy and solitude for them, and making them readers and thinkers of significant thoughts from the beginning.

That's if you want to teach them to think. There is no evidence that this has been a State purpose since the start of compulsion schooling.

When Frederich Froebel, the inventor of kindergarten in 19th century Germany, fashioned his idea he did not have a "garden for children" in mind, but a metaphor of teachers as gardeners and children as the vegetables.

Kindergarten was created to be a way to break the influence of mothers on their children. I note with interest the growth of day care in the US and the repeated urgings to extend school downward to include 4-year-olds. The movement toward state socialism is not some historical curiosity but a powerful dynamic force in the world around us.

The state socialism movement is fighting for its life against those forces which would, through vouchers or tax credits, deprive it of financial lifeblood, and it has countered this thrust with a demand for even more control over children's lives, and even more money to pay for the extended school day and year that this control requires. A movement as visibly destructive to individuality, family and community as government-system schooling has been might be expected to collapse in the face of its dismal record, coupled with an increas-

ingly aggressive shake down of the taxpayer, but this has not happened.

The explanation is largely found in the transformation of schooling from a simple service to families and towns to an enormous, centralized corporate enterprise. While this development has had a markedly adverse effect on people and on our democratic traditions, it has made schooling the single largest employer in the United States, and the largest grantor of contracts next to the Defence Department.

Both of these low-visibility phenomena provide monopoly schooling with powerful political friends, publicists, advocates and other useful allies. This is a large part of the explanation why no amount of failure ever changes things in schools, or changes them for very long. School people are in a position to outlast any storm and to keep short-attention-span public scrutiny thoroughly confused.

An overview of the short history of this institution reveals a pattern marked by intervals of public outrage, followed by enlargement of the monopoly in every case. After nearly 30 years spent inside a number of public schools, some considered good, some bad, I feel certain that management cannot clean its own house. It relentlessly marginalizes all significant change.

There are no incentives for the "owners" of the structure to reform it, nor can there be without outside competition. What has been needed for several decades is the kind of wildly-swinging free market we had at the beginning of our national history.

It cannot be overemphasized that no body of theory exists to accurately define the way children learn, or which learning is of most worth. By pretending the existence of such we have cut ourselves off from the information and innovation that only a real market can provide. Fortunately our national situation has been so favourable, so dominant through most of our history, that the margin of error afforded has been vast.

But the future is not so clear. Violence, narcotic addictions, divorce, alcoholism, loneliness — all these are but tangible measures of a poverty in education. Surely schools, as the institutions monopolizing the daytimes of childhood, can be called to account for this. In a democracy the final judges cannot be experts, but only the people.

Trust the people, give them choices, and the school nightmare will vanish in a generation.

.....John Taylor Gatto

Notes by Wayne Green:

No, Gatto is *not* exaggerating. You've been had — screwed — brainwashed into believing in a system which has made it so very few people are able to think for themselves once they've been through our public school system. Hey, it happened to *me* too! It took years before I began to see around the curtain.

But then, we're prisoners not only of our socialist state, hobbled in our ability to think, but also, as a result, unable to break free of an even much larger system of deception. The whole fraudulent system keeps all but a few of us from ever making much money. It keeps us eating food and poisoning our bodies with the result that we are cutting our potential lifespans in half.

That's right, our cells and bodies can easily live to 120 and even 150 years if given the proper care.

Somehow, despite my being put through the same brain and free will grinder as everyone else, I eventually managed to break through to the real world that is hidden from us by our school system, families, and the media.

Ever since I finally understood how I's been had I've been preaching rebellion. I've been trying to get my readers and listeners to at least get a glimpse of reality. Yes, I'm up against formidable odds. Most of us not only have been trained not to think, we will fight thinking as a weapon of the devil. We believe what the media tells us. Whe believe our teachers and our parents. We believe our priests. All without question. Many of us are so thoroughly under the spell of our teachers that we will kill in the name of our beliefs.

Gatto is preaching revolution. He's trying his best to get people to actually think, and to understand why it is so difficult for them to do so. Independent thinking goes against everything we've been taught.

In my book, *The Secret Guide to Wealth*, I explain what a horrible waste of money and time college is as far as making lots of money is concerned. The college route not only robs us of four of what could be our most productive years, it virtually sentences us to a lifetime of never making much money. A lifetime of being a worker — of working for others.

Well, that's what the American school system was designed to do — to take a wide variety of raw material and turn out as identical a product as possible, one geared to work without asking questions or causing trouble.

Our first schools were organized by our church leaders with the goal of producing easily led churchgoers. The last thing they wanted was a bunch of people all thinking for themselves. Then along came the industrial revolution, and its need for workers for the factories. Again, they needed workers who would do what they were told and not ask questions. And they got 'em. The system has done just exactly what it was supposed to do. And you and I are the products of this mass production factory-like school system.

In my *Wealth* book I explain how easy it is to break free of the system and make it possible for you to make all of the money you want. I even explain how you can get other people to happily pay you to learn what you need to know to do it. I explain how you can get an ideal job with no college, no résumé, and not even any experience, and how anyone can do this from 17 to 70.

Then there's my book, *The Secret Guide to Health*. In that one I explain how simple it is to get over *any* illness you have and to probably double your life span without ever having to worry about having a heart attack, cancer, a stroke, or being put into a nursing home. But you aren't going to do this until you are able to break some habits your parents, peers, the media and your schools brainwashed you into believing. Until then, like virtually everyone in the country, you are going to be a prisoner of the system, the government and the major industries which run it.

In my *Secret Guide to Wisdom* I review around a hundred books that will help you break loose from the brainwashing our schools and media inflict on all of us. These books will give you a better perspective on the medical and school industries. Alas, nothing is as it seems. The downside of your educating yourself is that you will be sharing my frustration over the inability of most people to think. Or to even *want* to think. Welcome to the club.

You'll share my frustration and my anger at having been so thoroughly taken in for so many years. When you discover that if you'd known better when you were a kid you could have been making all the money you want, and have been free to travel anywhere in the world, and do just about anything you want to, I'll bet you'll be angry too.

You may get angry over how our government has managed to lose one war after another since WWII — in Korea, Vietnam, the war on poverty, the war on drugs, and you may even get a little angry over Saddam Hussein smirking in Iraq. And all of this with you paying all the bills. Or else! You're paying for our crooked medical industry as well as our bloated school system where teachers, no matter how terrible, can't be fired.

I do hope you'll read the exposés in *Secret Guide* series. I hope you'll stop being a wage slave, complete with endless commuting. I hope you'll change your diet and thumb your nose at doctors, hospitals, nursing homes, and the trillion dollar pharmaceutical industry.

The ball is in your court, so start swinging.

Recommended Reading

To learn more about the crisis in the American school system there are several books you'll find of value. Here are some that I highly recommend:

Dumbing Us Down — The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling by John Taylor Gatto
How To Teach School Real Good — A sort of handbook for teachers by Dick Gaillard
Inside American Education — The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas by Thomas Sowell
Ed School Follies — The Miseducation of America's Teachers by Rita Kramer
Making Schools Better by Larry Martz
Educational Renaissance — Our Schools At The Turn of the Twenty-First Century By Cetron & Gayle
A Blueprint for Educational Reform by Connaught Marshner
Circles of Learning — Cooperation in the Classroom by David Johnson
The Learning Gap — Why our schools are failing and what we can learn from Japanese and Chinese education by Steveson & Stigler
The Closing of the American Mind by Allen Bloom

Smart School, Smart Kids — Why do some schools work? by Edward Fiske
Liberating Schools by David Boaz
Schools That Work — America's Most Innovative Public Education Programs by George Wood.
The Fall of the Ivory Tower — The bankrupting of American higher education by George Roche.
Control Theory in the Classroom by Glasser.
The Open Classroom — A new way of teaching by Kohl.
The American Schools 1642-1985 by Spring.
The Case Against College by Bird.
Free At Last — The Sudbury Valley School by Greenberg.
The Sudbury Valley School Experience.
Worlds In Creation By Greenberg.
Kingdom of Childhood — Growing up at Sudbury Valley School.
Legacy of Trust — Life after the Sudbury Valley Experience.
A New Look At Schools by Greenberg.
The Crisis In American Education.
Outcome Based Education — The State's Assault on Our Children's Values by Luksik and Hoffecker.
The Continuum Concept by Liedloff.

The most exciting development in schools is the Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Mass. Here's a school that takes students from 4-20 and allows them to learn whatever they want, whenever they want. That's right, no required subjects, no curriculum, no grades, no tests, no memorization, not even any classrooms such as you'd recognize.

Not only does the system work, it works well and clones of the school are popping up around the country. The school costs about half that of a public school to run, but then there's no administrative overhead, and that will cut the cost of almost any school in half right there.

Read *Free At Last* and eat your heart out that you didn't get to go to a school like this. Or your kids. The 184-page book is $7 plus $2 s/h from Sudbury Valley Scool Press, 2 Winch St., Framingham, MA 01701. 508-877-3030.

Yes, of course I have some suggestions for improving on the Sudbury Valley School. For instance, I'd like to see an effort to get kids interested in things, rather than just waiting and hoping they'll luck into stuff. I'd love to visit the school and get as many kids as I could interested in amateur radio, in horseback riding, in learning a bunch of skills, in history, in learning about other countries and people, and in reading.

You can keep up with the things I'm learning and my ideas by reading my editorials in *73* magazine, or in buying reprints of 'em. My collected 1997 editorials run to 320 pages and they'll get you thinking. $15. The first eight months of 1998's editorials run to 188 pages and are $10.

You'll want my secret guides to wealth, health, and wisdom. $5 each. I'll combine the three when I get time. Have you an idea for a title which will help get it onto the best seller's lists?

If you don't have my *Here's The Deal* catalog yet, it's free.

One more thing. If you run across any books that I'd be crazy not to read, please let me know the details.

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